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Smokejumper Obituary: Nielsen, Arild Christian (Missoula 1942)

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Smokejumper Obituary

Nielsen, Arild Christian (Missoula 1942)

Arild was born May 1, 1922, in Williston, North Dakota. He attended school in Williston until about 1937 when the family moved to Missoula, Montana. He graduated from Missoula County High School where he was on the high school boxing team in the 145-pound weight division.

After high school he attended the University of Montana for two years working summers as a Forest Service lookout and in 1942 as a Missoula smokejumper, making at least three fire jumps.

After smokejumping, Arild enlisted in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper and in March 1944, he graduated from the Army Air Forces advanced flying school as a second lieutenant. He married in August 1944 and continued serving in the military while he and his wife had three children. He flew in the Pacific theater of operations in WWII and in the Korean Conflict.

Contact with Arild was lost on May 26, 1951, when the F-82 he was flying disappeared in North Korea while flying a weather reconnaissance mission 20 miles north of the 38th parallel. In July 1951, he was officially listed as Missing in Action and in July 1954, he was reported as "presumed dead" when a returned prisoner of war from communist North Korea reported that "Captain Nielsen died while a prisoner of the Reds." Arild's remains were never recovered.

His name is inscribed on the Courts of the Missing at the Honolulu, Hawaii Memorial, at the National Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and at the Korean War Memorial in Missoula, Montana. Arild was awarded the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Purple Heart, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and the Korean War Service Medal.

(end of excerpt)